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Arms Control: MBFR Talks

October 1982

Background: Negotiations on mutual and balanced force reductions (MBFR) in Central Europe, involving 12 members of NATO and the 7 Warsaw Pact members, began in Vienna in 1973. The primary Western objective is to lower tensions in Central Europe through a reduction in ground forces and establishment of parity at lower levels, in the form of a common collective ceiling on each side's military manpower. Eastern superiority in ground forces is a major destablilizing factor in the military situation; its elimination could reduce the risk of war in Europe. On July 8, 1982, the West tabled a draft MBFR treaty embodying a new, comprehensive NATO proposal designed to give renewed momentum to the negotiations and produce a verifiable agreement.

The Western proposal: The new proposal calls for a single comprehensive agreement under which all direct participants (those which would take reductions) with major military formations in Central Europe would assume contractual obligations to undertake ground force reductions to reach a common collective ceiling on each side of about 700,000 ground personnel and about 900,000 ground and air force personnel combined. Reductions would be accomplished in four fully verifiable stages within 7 years. Starting manpower totals for both sides would be specified in the treaty. As in the West's 1979 proposals, the first stage would be limited to US and Soviet ground force reductions of 13,000 and 30,000 respectively. Subsequent reductions by all direct participants would be taken in three equal stages. After 7 years, the East, on the basis of January 1981 Western figures, will have had to reduce its ground forces by about 260,000 personnel and the West, by about 100,000.

By offering a treaty commitment that requires each direct participant with major units in the area to make a significant force reduction, the proposal meets Eastern concerns that some participants would make only symbolic reductions. Upon signature of the agreement, an intra-alliance decision on overall Western reduction quotas would be announced, giving precise information on the reduction shares of individual participants. Western direct participants also would issue a unilateral statement at the time of signature that they would each continue their individual contribution to NATO's combined ground and air force manpower totals, thus meeting Eastern concerns about a sharp change in the makeup of Western forces.

Manpower data: According to Western data, the Warsaw Pact has deployed in Central Europe 57 divisions and a total of about 960,000 ground force personnel, compared with NATO's 25 divisions and 800,000--an Eastern superiority of 160,000 men. The East insists that rough parity in manpower already exists. This large discrepancy between the two sides' figures on Eastern manpower is the central unresolved issue in the negotiations. The West has insisted on agreed

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data as the basis for agreement on the size of reductions needed to reach parity. NATO has full confidence in Western figures and continues to insist that an agreement be based on agreed data. The West has tabled several proposals to resolve the discrepancy.

Verification: A program of verification and inspection, currently in the form of seven associated measures proposed by the West in its draft treaty, is a prerequisite to an agreement. Associated measures would enhance confidence and improve verification through assurances about the nature of each side's military activities and about compliance with agreed reductions and limits on manpower.

These associated measures are the following:

- Each side would give advance notice of out-of-garrison activity by one or more division-size formations; alert activities would be notified when they begin.
- Each side would have the right to send observers to these out-of-garrison activities. (The West has proposed that these first two measures cover the territory of all European participants, including a large part of the western USSR, and not only the reduction area.)
- Each side would give advance notification of major military movements into the reduction area by ground forces of direct participants whose home territory is outside the area.
- Each side would have the right to conduct an annual quota of ground and/or aerial inspections on the territory of the other side in the reduction area.
- Permanent exit/entry points would be established to monitor military movements into and out of the area; observers would be stationed at these points for the duration of the treaty.
- Information would be exchanged on forces to be withdrawn; there would be continuing exchanges of information on personnel strengths and organization of forces in the reduction area.
- Interference with national technical means of verification would be prohibited.

The East has stated its acceptance of the concept of associated measures but thus far has insisted on a far more modest package than the West believes necessary.

Prospects: Achievement of an agreement depends heavily on the East. Although the East accepts the principle of parity for military manpower in the reduction area in the form of a common collective ceiling, it disputes the Western figures on Eastern forces. It also has agreed in principle to the concept of collectivity, meaning that each alliance determines independently the size of individual national components that make up its overall force levels under the ceiling. A key element of the Eastern program has always been the need for a binding commitment by all direct participants to take reductions. Under the new approach, the West would make a stronger commitment along these lines than ever proposed before. A constructive and substantive reply to the Western draft treaty by the East should indicate whether there is serious Eastern interest in conventional force reductions in Central Europe.